



# Get the Knack of the Census Tract!

History, Concepts, and Characteristics of the Census Bureau's Most Misunderstood Geography.

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# References & Further Reading:

Butler, J. 1997. "Protestant Success in the New American City, 1870-1920: The Anxious Secrets of Rev. Walter Laidlaw, Ph.D." in *New Directions in American Religious History*, Ed. Stout, H. & Hart, D.G. Oxford Univ. Press.

Green, H. W. "A Period of Great Growth and Development: 1926-1946" in *Proceedings of the National Geographic Areas Conference*; Issued Sept 1984, U.S. Census Bureau.

Krieger, N. 2006. "A Century of Census Tracts: health & the Body Politic (1906-2006)." *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*. V. 83, No. 3.

U.S. Census Bureau, 1966. *Census Tract Manual*.

U.S. Census Bureau, 1947. *Census Tract Manual, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* [Available at: [https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/tracts\\_and\\_block\\_numbering\\_areas.html](https://www.census.gov/history/www/programs/geography/tracts_and_block_numbering_areas.html)]

# Many Censuses: 1890 - 1910

- National Census
- State Censuses
- Church Groups Censuses

103  
239

SCHEDULE I.—Free Inhabitants in Springfield in the County of Hungarian State  
of Minnesota enumerated by me, on the 7th day of November 1850. T. Bullock Ass't Marshal 120

The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.		DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	Place or Birth. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.		Whether deaf and dumb, blind, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
1	2	Age.	Sex.	Color.				10	11	
	George Watson	5	M				Ills			
	Thos. M. Watson	4	D				"			
	Samuel Watson	2	M				"			
	Frederick Watson	7	M				"			
692	Geo. Woods	42	M		Tailor ✓	800	England ✓			
	Eliza Woods	40	D				Wij ✓			
	Sarah Woods	16	D				"			
	Harriet M. Woods	14	D				Ills			
	M. A. Woods	12	D				"			
	Lyso W. Woods	10	M				"			
	Sophia Woods	7	D				"			
	Ed. W. Woods	5	M				"			
	Wm. W. Woods	2	M				"			
	Sarah Wiley	72	D				Wij ✓			
	Tharish Wiley	50	D				"			
	Jane Wermady	60	D				"			
93	St. M. Wilmer	34	M		Carpenter ✓	1000	Pa ✓			
	Martha Whitmer	26	D				Wij ✓			
	Mary E. Whitmer	6	D				Wij			
94	Wm. J. Wallcott	64	M		Warden 4th. Ct. ✓	1200	Pa ✓			
	Eliza Wallcott	54	D				Pa ✓			
	Wm. Stachdale	28	M		Clark ✓		England ✓			
	Jane Stachdale	26	D				Ills			
	Robert Stachdale	24	M		Carpenter ✓	400	Wij ✓			
95	Alsa Eastman	45	M		Miller ✓	5750	Wij ✓			
	Anna S. Eastman	8	D				Ills			
	Anna W. Eastman	37	D				Wij ✓			
	Wm. W. Eastman	32	D				"			
	Abby Kiefner	22	D				Germany ✓			
	George Eastman	38	M		Teacher ✓		Wij ✓			
	Wm. K. Bondy	29	M		Merchant ✓		Wij ✓			
96	Abraham Lincoln	40	M		Atty at Law ✓		Wij ✓			
	Mary Lincoln	28	D				"			
	Robert Lincoln	7	M				Ills			
	Catharine Gordon	18	D				Scotland ✓			
97	L. B. Ophdyke	55	M		Merchant ✓	18000	Pa ✓			
	Thos. Ophdyke	14	M				Ills			
	Charlotte Ophdyke	10	D				"			
98	William Lowry	70	M		none ✓		Scotland ✓			
	Eliza Lowry	60	D				Pa			

# From Sanitary District To Census Tract

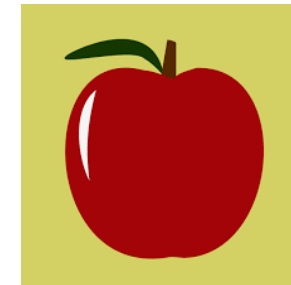
- Director, Fed. of Churches
- Walter Laidlaw
- Devised Plan pre-1910
- Census Bureau accepts





# 1910 Census

- NYC: 40-acre “districts”
- 7 Other cities (over 500K) get “tracts”
- Only NYC uses tract data



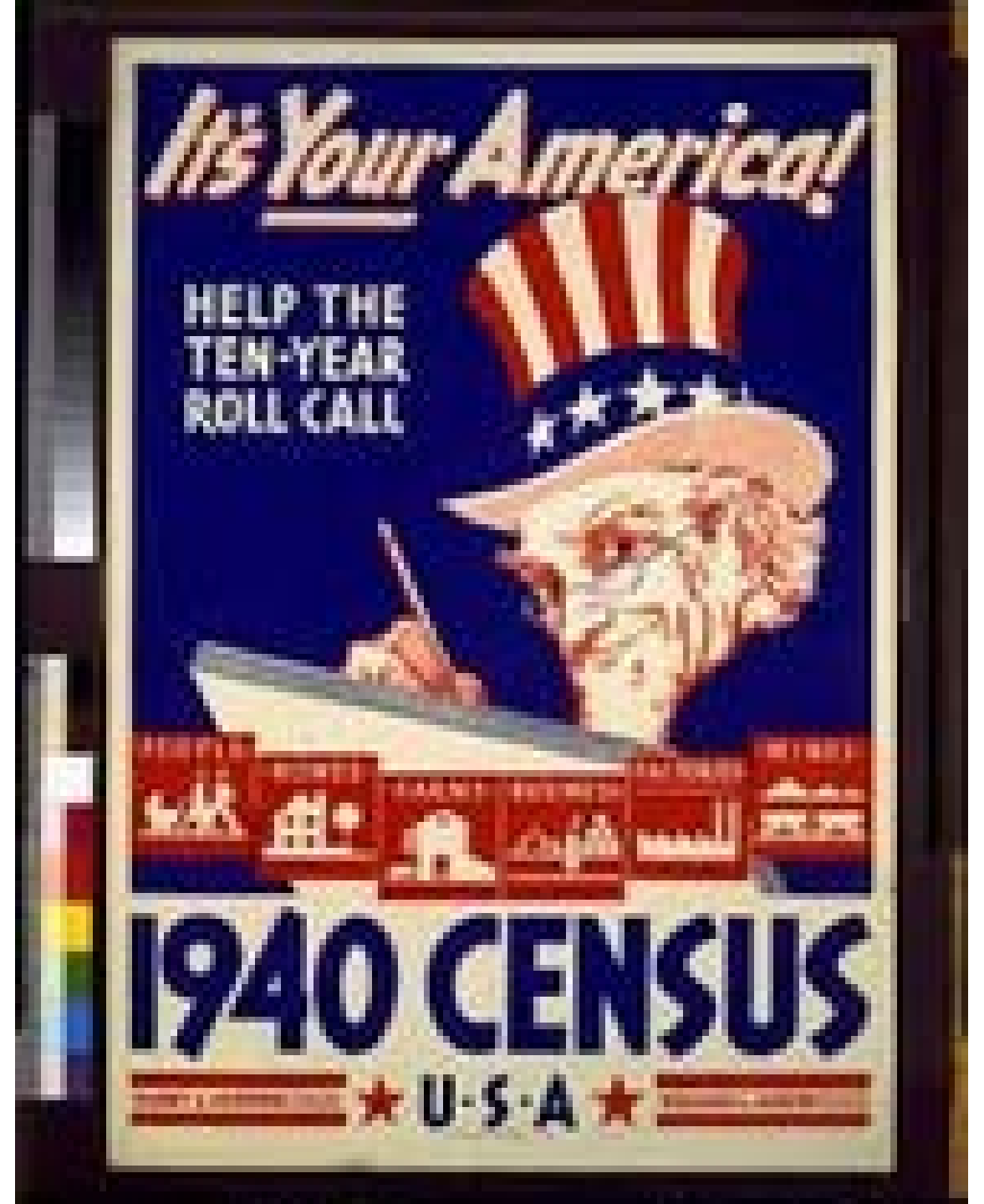
## Census Bureau takes up the cause:

- mid 1920's – Chicago & Cleveland purchased data
- Howard Whipple Green Retrofits Cleveland 1927
- HWG Appointed chairman of Committee on Census Enumeration Areas
- 1930 : 18 Cities are tracted



# Nationwide Tracting

- 1940, Tract becomes an official 'entity'.
- 1940: 1st time tract Data is free to cities
- Publishes for cities >50,000
- Urban Areas created tract teams.
- Block Numbering Areas-What's that?



# Population Characteristics of Tracts:

- Optimally 4000 people; range between 1200-8000.
- The optimal size for ACS data.
- Tracts are subdivided if population swells.





# Geographic Attributes of Tracts:

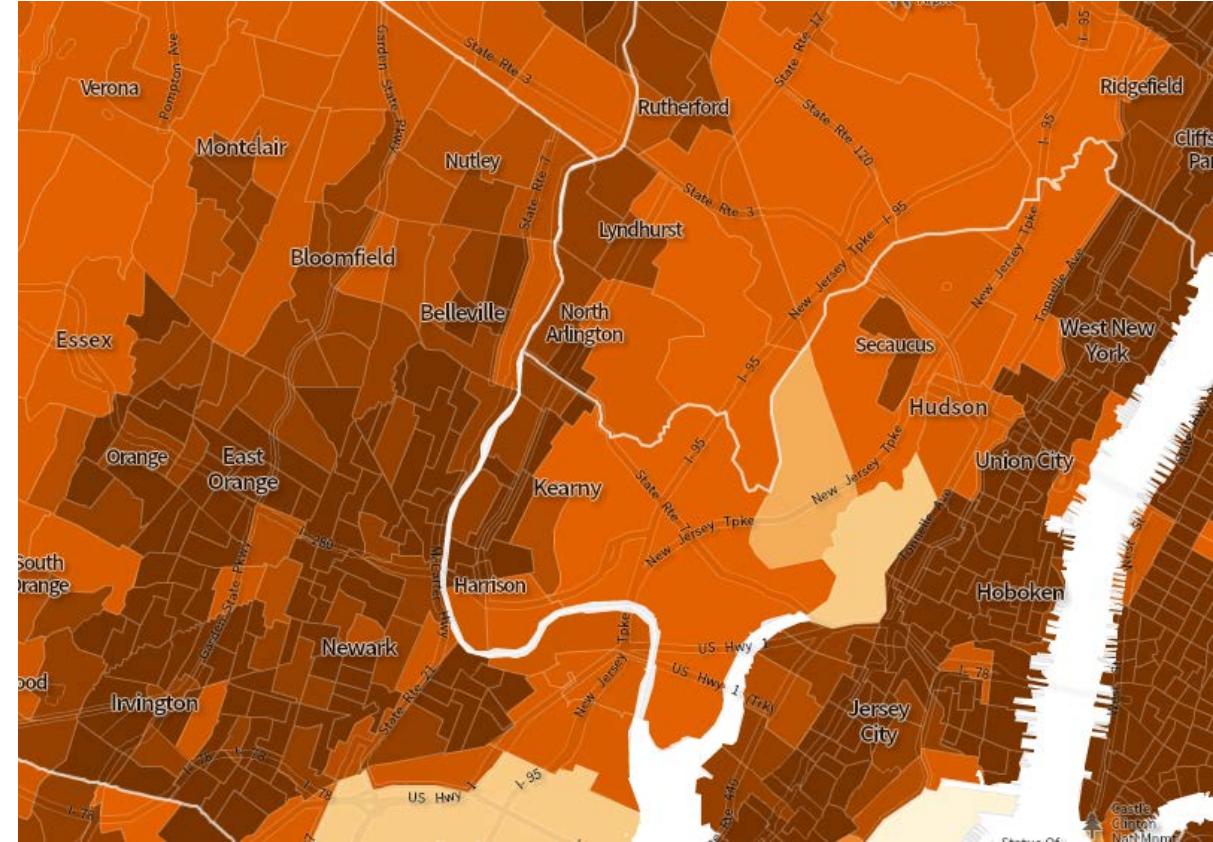
- Originally created with biz districts in mind
- Do not cross county boundaries
- Do not cross MCD (Town/Twp) lines in NE.
- Do not cross CCD boundaries in SE & W

*Recognize the central business district in large cities*



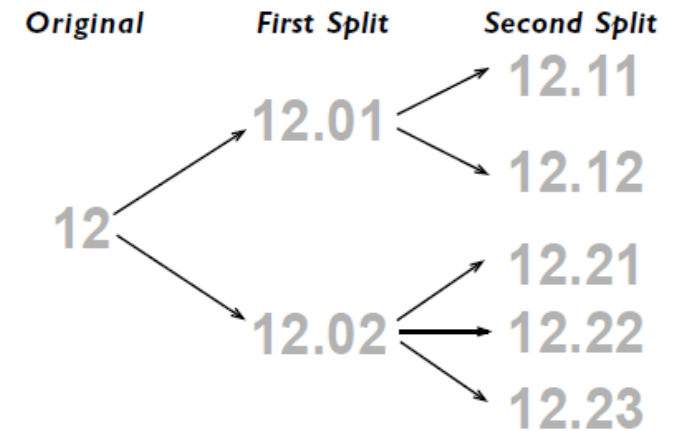
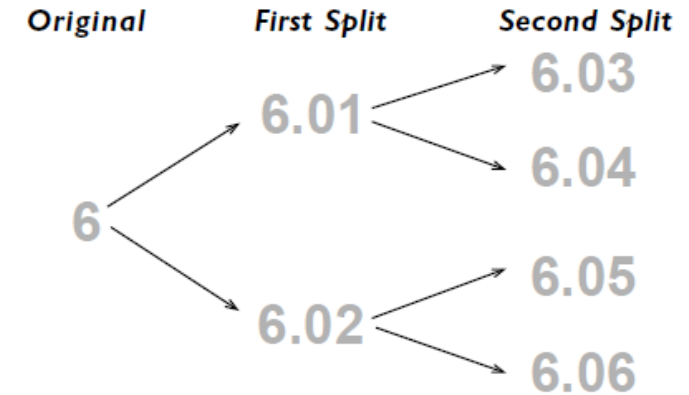
## Other Attributes of Tracts:

- follow the built and natural environment
- Wall-to-wall, nationwide regardless of governmental boundaries.
- Temporal



# Tract numbering scheme

- Subdivided if population increases, for example: Tract 20.00 becomes 20.01 and 20.02
- Numbers appear differently: 20, 002000 or 0020.00
- Recombining Tracts?
- How often?



# Current-day Tract delineation.

- Once a decade
- Splitting and recombining Tracts if necessary.
- PSAP
  - Local Gov't (County) Participation
  - Cooperation

BILLING CODE 3510-07-P

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### Bureau of the Census

[Docket Number 070321065-7903-02]

### Census Tract Program for the 2010 Decennial Census—Final Criteria

AGENCY: Bureau of the Census, Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of Final Criteria and Program Implementation.

**SUMMARY:** Census tracts are relatively permanent small-area geographic divisions of a county or statistically equivalent entity<sup>1</sup> defined for the tabulation and presentation of data from the decennial census and selected other statistical programs. Census tracts will also be used to tabulate and publish estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS)<sup>2</sup> after 2010.

<sup>1</sup> For the Census Bureau's purposes, the term "county" includes parishes in Louisiana; boroughs,

and independent statistical areas (PSAP). In addition, to the PSAP also encompasses an update of block groups, designated places, and divisions (in selected states).  
**DATES:** This notice's final criteria are effective on March 14, 2007.  
**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** Geographic Standards and Branch, Geography Division, Census Bureau, via e-mail at [geo.psap.list@census.gov](mailto:geo.psap.list@census.gov) or (301) 763-3056.

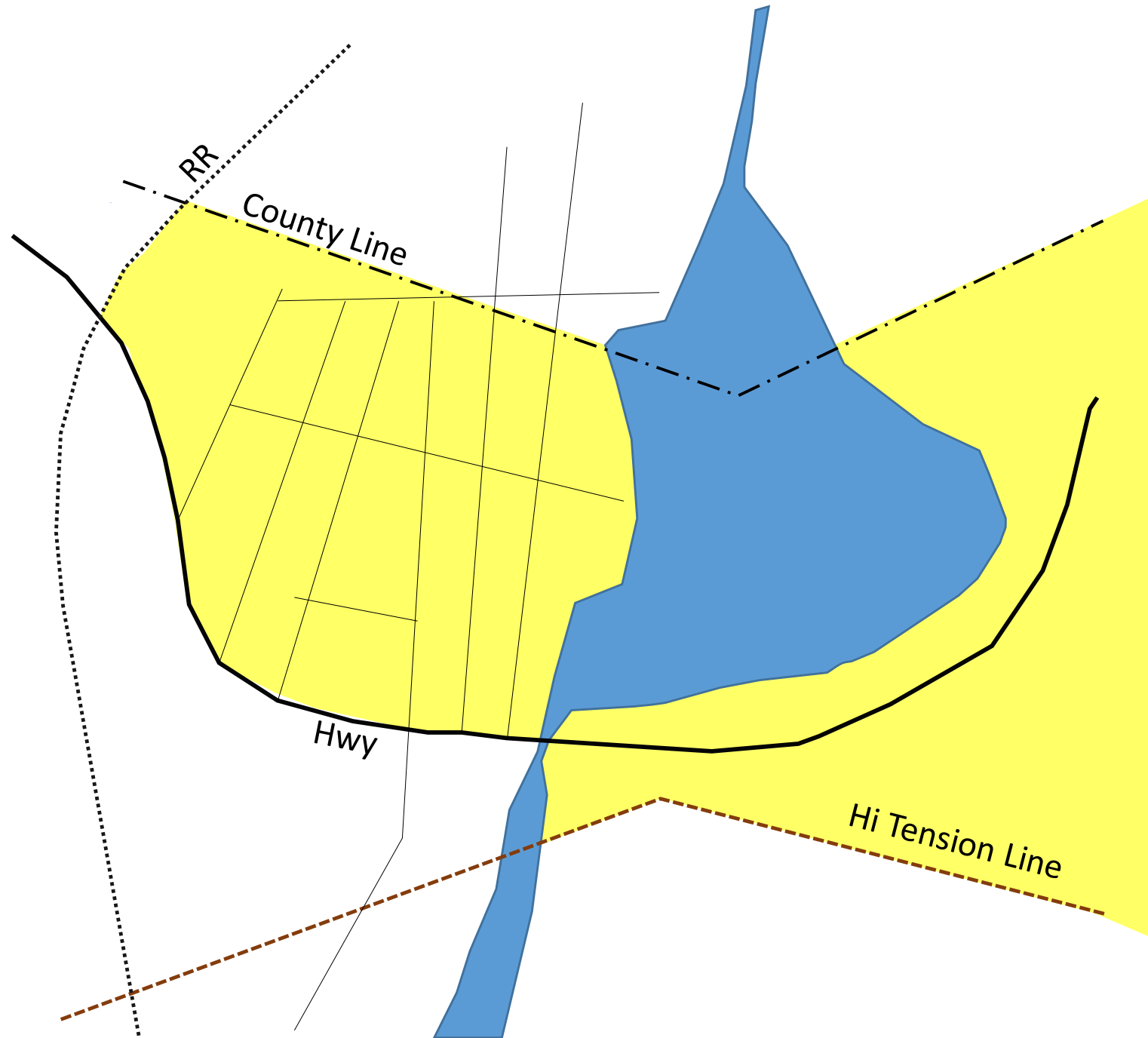
## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

### I. History of Census Tracts

In 1905, Dr. Walter L. Hahn introduced the concept of permanent geographic divisions for the census. Since that time, the concept has been widely used with the Census Bureau. Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Louisville are examples of territories.

# Anatomy of a Census Tract

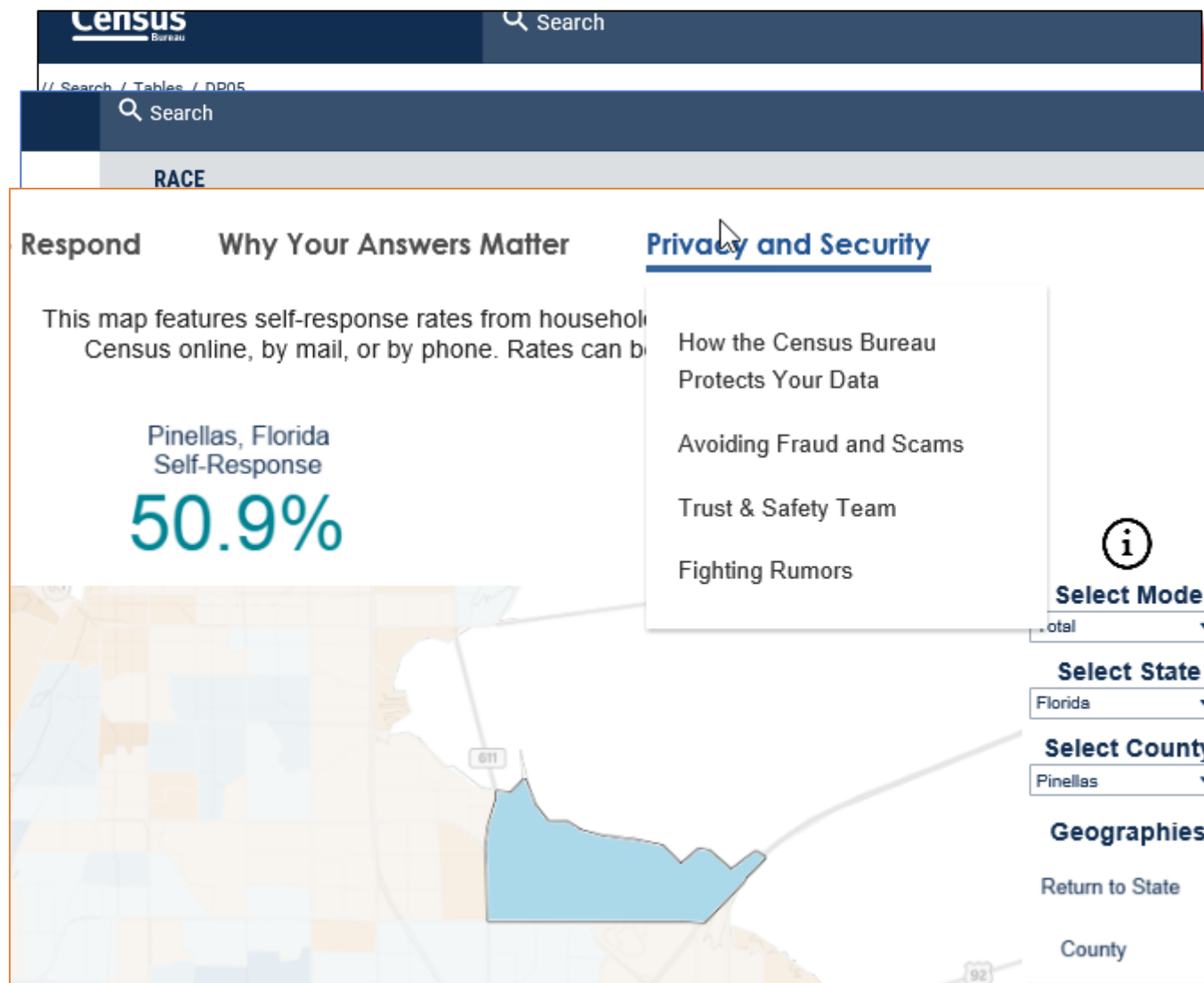
- Boundary cannot cross County Line
- Boundary often extends into water areas
- Things we can see on the ground:
  - street, river, pathway, high-tension line
- Surveyed boundaries:
  - County Boundary, Minor Civil Divisions in the NE





# What data is available at a tract level?

- ACS 5-year data
- Decennial Data
- Response-rate data



# Where can you see your Census tracts? Where can you find data?\*

TIGERWeb:

([http://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerwebmain/tigerweb\\_main.html](http://tigerweb.geo.census.gov/tigerwebmain/tigerweb_main.html))

FEDERAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS EXAMINATION  
COUNCIL

<https://geomap.ffiec.gov/FFIECGeocMap/GeocodeMap1.aspx>

Data.census.gov\*

[www.census.gov/roam](http://www.census.gov/roam)\*

# Contact Info

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